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NEW YORK TIMES

10 April 1987

# F.B.I. Chief Reportedly Told Meese to Quit Inquiry

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 9 — William H. Webster, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, urged Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d to disqualify himself from the investigation of the Iran-contra affair last November, according to Administration officials.

Mr. Webster suggested that Mr. Meese "recuse" himself because he had helped prepare President Reagan's secret authorization of the arms sales to Iran in January 1986, the officials said. That action could have made Mr. Meese a possible witness in the investigation.

Mr. Webster acted after Mr. Meese disclosed on Nov. 25 that Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North had been involved in diverting funds from the Iran arms sales to the covert supply operation for Nicaraguan rebels, the officials added.

A spokesman for the Justice Department, Terry Eastland, said that in the week after Mr. Meese's disclosure he and Mr. Webster discussed the investigation and in the course of the talks "the subject of recusal had come up."

## Vote to Come After Recess

But Mr. Eastland said that he was not aware Mr. Webster had sought to exert any influence on Mr. Meese and that when Mr. Meese sought the appointment of an independent counsel in mid-December to investigate the Iran-contra scandal, he had effectively removed himself.

"The independent counsel statute is a recusal statute," Mr. Eastland said.

Mr. Meese "took himself out."

A spokesman for the F.B.I., Sue Schnitzer, said she had no information on Mr. Webster's reported request because Mr. Webster and his top aides were all at hearings on Mr. Webster's nomination to be Director of Central Intelligence before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence this afternoon.

At the hearings, which began Wednesday and are scheduled to end this evening after a closed-door session, Mr. Webster has made no mention of his suggestion to Mr. Meese last November.

Before going into the closed session, Senator David L. Boren, Democrat of Oklahoma, the chairman of the committee, said he expected Mr. Webster would be confirmed. He said no vote would be taken until the committee returned from its Easter recess on April 20.

## 'In the Timeliest Way'

In this afternoon's open session, Mr. Webster repeated a pledge he made Wednesday to keep the Senate committee fully informed about covert operations like the Iran arms sales. The previous Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, who resigned in January after surgery to remove a cancerous brain tumor, had come under heavy criticism for his failure to keep Congress informed as required by law about covert actions involving the Central Intelligence Agency.

President Reagan and Mr. Casey never notified Congress about the President's "finding" that approved the arms shipments to Iran early in 1986. The finding, which Mr. Meese helped prepare, barred Mr. Casey from disclosing it.

In testimony before the Senate panel today, Mr. Webster said, "My pledge is to notify you in the timeliest way possible" about secret operations.

Mr. Webster said he would try to inform the Senate and House intelligence committees within "several days, 48 hours, as soon as possible" after the President had authorized a covert action.

Under questioning from Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, the vice-chairman of the committee, Mr. Webster said he had "no doubts at the present time" that he would be able to fulfill his pledge.

Mr. Webster also repeated a promise he made Wednesday that he would resign if he found himself in sharp disagreement with the President over failure to keep Congress informed about covert operations. After he resigned, he said, he would "go to the extent permitted me by law" to tell the committee about what had happened.

## Concern Expressed Over North

In the session Wednesday, Mr. Webster testified that he had long had doubts about Colonel North's behavior. These doubts grew out of discussions he had with Oliver B. Revell, the executive assistant director of the F.B.I., a close friend of Colonel North who worked with him on a counterterrorism group under the National Security

Council.

Speaking of Colonel North, Mr. Webster said, "I think we worried about his role in the N.S.C." Colonel North was "a very gung-ho type of person, with tunnel vision, without a broader gauge vision of what he was doing," Mr. Webster told the committee.

Mr. Webster also said he had talked with Mr. Meese about his concerns about Colonel North. But he did not say when the conversation took place or what the outcome was.

Mr. Webster's disclosure that he harbored suspicions about Colonel North and had mentioned them to Mr. Meese raised further questions about why the F.B.I. and the Justice Department had not acted sooner to investigate Colonel North's role in the Iran arms sales and support for the contra rebels.

After Mr. Meese asked the F.B.I. to begin an investigation on Nov. 26, Mr. Revell withdrew himself from the case because of his close relationship with Colonel North, a spokesman for the F.B.I. said today.

Until then, an Administration official said, Mr. Revell had believed Colonel North's activities on behalf of the contras were actually a C.I.A.-sponsored operation.

So far neither House nor Senate investigators have questioned Mr. Revell about his knowledge of Colonel North's activities or what he may have told Mr. Webster about them. But the Administration officials said that Mr. Revell had not known about Colonel North's diversion of funds from the Iran arms shipments to the contras.